Best Practice Update

Transition in North Dakota

This introductory issue describes the context of transition services & outlines initiatives and programming

Transition

Transition is planning for one's future after high school while <u>still</u> in high school. We all plan for events in our lives; as parents we planned and prepared our children for kindergarten, we planned and prepared our children for their first communion, catechism, or bamitzva. As parents, we will help our children purchase their first car, even help plan their weddings. The same must be said for helping to provide for their independence after high school. While it is critical to provide information and resources to all students about their future, it is especially true of students with disabilities. Planning for their future after high school may likely take coordination between many people and agencies, and like all events, the key to success is early planning – while in high school, not after graduation.

The movement of both transition and school to work efforts has encouraged students to become familiar with occupational choices, vocational preparation and career planning at an earlier age to ensure maximum opportunity of curricular selections and involvement of secondary school resources. A smooth transition is possible with planning and information. Planning what will be needed and who can help provide that assistance is of utmost importance to successful networking. Information about the many choices and programs available also requires early planning and decision making. Too often, assumptions are made about an individual's skill level in critical areas; this presumption often leaves both the student and IEP team unprepared.

Self-advocacy, or speaking up for one's self, is also an opportunity and a responsibility for young adults. Participating in the decision making process of the IEP meeting, seeking employment or planning one's college future requires knowledge of disability, interests and needs. Making decisions is never easy, but being adequately prepared to do so gives each student an advantage.

The Federal law regulating education of students with disabilities, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) of 1997 specifically identifies transition as:

> *A coordinated set of activities for a student, designed within an outcome-oriented process, which promotes movement from school to post-school activities including post-secondary education, vocational training and education, integrated employment including supported employment, continuing and adult education, adult services, independent living, and community participation.*
>
> *The coordinated set of activities shall be based upon the individual student's needs, taking into account the student's preferences and interests, experiences, and shall include instruction, community experiences, the development of employment and other post-school adult living objectives, and, when appropriate, acquisition of daily living skills and functional vocational evaluation.*

Transition makes education relevant to the student and is driven by the following beliefs:

- The IEP represents and supports the vision of the student and the student's family.
- Transition drives the IEP process to prepare the student for the changes and demands of life after high school.
- Transition is an ongoing and outcome-oriented process including commitment of resources, collaboration between people and agencies, and decision-making to develop an IEP for the student.
- Transition allows the entire community, especially the family, the school, and adult service agencies, to share the responsibility in the transition of the student.
- Transition planning promotes relevant, ongoing, outcome-oriented instructional experiences within the least restrictive environment, including community-based experiences.

Keys to successful Transition:

- Early planning and involvement;
- Continuous and functional assessment process as to interests, needs and goals;
- Interactive IEP meetings;
- Knowledge of self and disability;
- Multiple work experiences;
- Academic infusion into the community;
- Networking with agency and community personnel;
- Creativity about planning future placements.

> "We won't let our students out of our school until they are prepared to go where they want to go."

Transition Domains

As any student prepares to leave high school and move on to new roles and responsibilities as an adult, there are many areas to consider:

1. Independent Living: Where will the student live and with whom? Can he/she live successfully on their own and be responsible to cook, shop, clean, pay bills, manage time, take care of themselves?

2. Community Participation: Can the student shop, vote, use the library, make health appointments and utilize their local community to be self sufficient? How will the student get around in the community? Does the student know how to access volunteer, community and church organizations?
3. Jobs & Jobs Training: Does the student have the skills to apply for a job and to work with others? What type of supports, if any, is available to provide assistance?
4. Recreation & Leisure: How does the student spend time alone and in groups? What does the student do for physical fitness and individual relaxation?
5. Post Secondary & Lifelong learning: Beyond high school, what will the student do to continue to learn and grow in post-secondary education and personal enjoyment? What supports will be necessary?

When does Transition begin?

The Individual with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) states that at age 14, and younger if necessary, the Individualized Education Program (IEP) team must begin to discuss transition. In North Dakota, the IEP teams have always begun transition at age 14. The law specifies the following:

At age 14, the IEP team must discuss and document –
- Post School Outcomes: What will the student want to do after high school in the areas of employment, independent living, recreation & leisure, community participation and lifelong learning.
- Statement of Transition Service Needs: What coursework will the student take from age 14 until school exit/graduation? When will the student graduate/exit the school system?

At age 16, the IEP team must also discuss and document –
- Statement of Needed Transition Services: What needs does the student have and who will be responsible for those services?
- Agency Collaboration & Responsibilities: What agencies other than the school will partner to provide services to the student and related timeframe?

Benefits from transition planning beginning by age 14 include:

- Realistic goals and plans based on the student's abilities and interests;
- Development of skills necessary to be successful in the chosen instructional, work, community, and living environments;
- Strong linkages between schools, families, and community service providers; and
- Improved employment and educational outcomes.

In addition, at least one year prior to age of majority (in ND that is age 18), the IEP team must discuss transfer of educational rights from parent(s) to student.

In summary, transition is a necessary and beneficial component of student success. If, as educators, we can give students solid footing for equal opportunity, self sufficiency, community participation and independent living, then we have indeed taught our children well.

North Dakota Department of Public Instruction
Office of Special Education

State Transition Initiatives

The Department of Public Instruction, Office of Special Education is committed to provide quality transition services to students' ages 14-21 who receive special education. The regulations of IDEA (Individuals with Disabilities Education Act) support both the intent and spirit of preparing for life after high school in a timely and seamless manner. Towards that goal, the Office of Special Education, regional and local stakeholders will work toward the following initiatives:

Belief Statements

We believe students should have the opportunity to work and lead a productive life with a team effort from ones entire community;
*

We believe all students, regardless of disability, deserve to have choices regarding school curriculum, recreation, employment and housing along with the resources available to pursue their choices;
*

We believe agencies, businesses, families and individuals need to work together to enable students of all abilities achieve their maximum potential as members of society;
*

We support ongoing training of teachers, parents, students, adult providers/agencies, colleges and business in the transition process;

Initiatives

The Transition IEP must be written in collaboration with students, parents and agency personnel to serve as a vehicle for a balance of academic & functional curriculum which provides instruction, services & community experiences to each student based on individualized needs, preferences & interests;

Each student will be referred to any supporting adult service provider in a timely manner to document & determine eligibility and services prior to high school exit/graduation to ensure a seamless transition;

The State agencies of Developmental Disabilities, Vocational Rehabilitation, Medicaid & Special Education will collaborate to maximize adult residential, social & employment services for students ages 18-21 who are ready for services before the 21st year;

To better prepare teachers and related providers, the Office of Special Education will prepare & deliver pre-service coursework in Transition;

The state monitoring system will include transition & evaluation of quality indictors of agency, community & school collaboration;

Follow up studies will be coordinated & maintained to identify post school outcomes & document transition indicators;

Technical assistance will be readily available regarding the key topics of student advocacy, functional vocational assessments, community based instruction and placement & multiple topical areas for all stakeholders;

The Transition IEP must be written in collaboration with students, parents & agency personnel to serve as a vehicle for a balance of academic & functional curriculum which provides instruction, services & community experiences to each student based on individualized needs, preferences and interests. The Transition IEP must be used as a meaningful document to move the student from high school to the most appropriate setting thereafter;

The Office of Special Education will continue to work with a collection of statewide stakeholders regarding the transition systems & interagency services through the collaboration of the Transition Steering Council.

Essential Secondary Special Education programming

FOUNDATION:

♦ A mission statement written and supported by all stakeholders and
   administration;

♦ Statements of vision (belief statements about the total program focus on student
   achievement toward post school goals);

♦ Program initiatives, goals and objectives which provide direction and strategies;

♦ Collaboration of ideas and services between school, family, adult agencies and the
   community;

♦ An understanding of the IDEA and its implications;

♦ An understanding of all stakeholders of why transition is critical for positive
   student outcomes;

♦ A district or unit memorandum of understanding with all partners.

PARTNERS:

♦ Students who begin the process understanding what transition is, understand
   their disability and why it's important to plan for their future while still in school
   at an early age;

♦ Students who have a realistic dream for their future and choices and advocate for
   such;

♦ Parents who accept the responsibility to support the school, advocate for their
   children and participate as equal partners in the process;

♦ Educators who have skills and competencies to coordinate, manage and provide a
   comprehensive secondary special education program which includes transition;

♦ A community who accepts and welcomes ALL students to use their business to develop interest, skill, and interpersonal relationships;

♦ Agencies who provide timely, quality services based on individual need and interest in a way which is simplistic for the family and young adult;

PROCESS:

♦ Students graduating with their peer class with an appropriate plan in place and supportive agencies and services designed to meet individual needs and interests;

♦ A process of on-going assessment/evaluation that focuses on student strengths and is used to determine student interests, needs and abilities;

♦ A continuum of career/vocational programs and opportunities from awareness to exploration to specific skill training;

♦ A process for comprehensive program evaluation which includes file reviews, a proactive approach to monitoring and/or self evaluation and an accountability system which measures program success according to achieving student outcomes;

♦ A system whereby all students are provided a variety of work experiences to understand the role of the worker, their personality and interest traits and their skills in the workplace and opportunities for independence;

♦ An accountability system in place which evaluate outcomes and programs using information from students, parents, agency providers and educators in the areas of post secondary education, employment, community participation, recreation & leisure, and independent living;

♦ An 'active' IEP which identifies services and creates opportunity for personal and academic growth;

♦ Standards and benchmarks for competencies driven by both academic and functional skills and abilities;

An essential Transition system

At age 14 ...

~ Students with disabilities are given information <u>and</u> opportunity to explore various career options and choices through

- Computer software programs;
- Inventories and community based assessments;
- On site community and employer visits, tours, job shadowing experiences.

~ Students are taking a variety of coursework to apply the academics with the functional application of life and career (home economics, vocational classes, music, and languages).

~ Students are expressing some knowledge and understanding of their disability and its impact on education and social skills, as well as an understanding of the basic concepts of the IEP process and the laws that protect them.

~ Students are working and talking with their parents and their IEP teams about the intent of planning for their future goals and plans.

~ Students are working and talking with their parents about taking care of themselves, participating in household and independent living skills, family and individual decisions, exposure to the community and self-advocacy skills for themselves.

This process continues until the age of 16 when the following concepts are also introduced

~ Students are working (volunteer, for credit, pay) within the community (with supports as indicated) in a field of interest to them and continue to do so until graduation.

~ Community based assessments continue to provide information to students and IEP teams about strengths and challenges.

~ Post secondary options are reviewed with no less than 3 on-site visits and interviews.

~ Graduation is preceded by referral to Vocational Rehabilitation, Job Services, Developmental Disabilities or NDUS disability support services.

~ Social graduation with class of peers is accepted as a readily available and supported option.

~ Paperwork transfers to adult provider with ease and minimum duplicity.

~ Student demonstrates some level of proficient social skills within classroom and community.

~ The need for supports from adult provider are identified and relationships created with providers who can direct and support IEP team.

~ Student self-advocacy becomes obvious to the extent possible in creating the plan document for adult life.

~ Accountability lies with the IEP team for post school provider relationships and referral.

~ Self-assessment for all students with disabilities is a continual process.

**TRANSITION
PROGRAMMING**

Family Involvement
- Family Training
- Family Involvement
- Family Empowerment

Student-Focused Planning
- IEP Development
- Student Participation
- Planning Strategies

Program Structure
- Program Philosophy
- Program Policy
- Strategic Planning
- Program Evaluation
- Resource Allocation
- Human Resource
  Development

Student Development
- Life Skills Instruction
- Career & Vocational
- Curricula
- Structured Work
  Experience
- Assessment
- Support Services

Interagency Collaboration
- Collaborative Framework
- Collaborative Service
  Delivery